Innovative and Versatile:

First Issue United States Stamped Envelopes 1853-1860

By showing examples of First Issue stamped envelopes used postally and out-of-the-mails, this exhibit explores innovations that added new dimensions to written communication during the brief dynamic antebellum era of national expansion driven by the California gold rush. Stamped envelopes were issued in June and July of 1853. After initial distributions of 3¢ letter-size envelopes on both white and buff paper, smaller 3¢ note-size and larger 6¢ official-size envelopes followed, all three with embossed red George Washington stamp imprints to meet the single and double letter rates for carriage less than 3,000 miles. Letter-size 6¢ green envelopes met the transcontinental single letter rate. (No 6¢ adhesive stamps met these needs.) When the transcontinental rate rose to 10¢ in 1855, envelopes in that denomination replaced the 6¢ green issue. First Issue stamped envelopes were phased out gradually after designs of the Second Issue were distributed in the late summer and fall of 1860. They were demonetized during the Civil War in 1861 and 1862 as Third Issue stamped envelopes were distributed.

The entire First Issue employed just nine master dies, numbered 1 through 5A for 3¢ denominations, 6 for all 6¢ envelopes, and 7 and 8 for 10¢ envelopes.

Die 2: THREE in short label with straight ends, 15½mm wide at top.

This New-York year-dated cancel was in use only from July 11 to 25, 1853. The cut square is the earliest documented use of die 2 on buff paper.

Hawaii to Prussia

Die 5: THREE in medium wide label with curved ends; 16mm wide at top, long crossbar on both Ts; small letter R.

Unique 3¢ First Issue envelope posted at Hawaii June 20, 1858. Total postage 37¢ paid - 5¢ Hawaiian plus 32¢ credited to U.S. (2¢ ship fee plus 30¢ Prussian closed mail). U.S. credited 7¢ to Prussia. Two-ocean voyage, Honolulu to San Francisco, via Panama to New York, to Southampton, to Aachen, arrival August 27 at Minden, Prussia. Professionally preserved and restored.